

## January 28, 2008 - Hidden Costs to the War in Iraq--The Problems we Face

### Hidden Costs to the War in Iraq --- The Problems we Face

By Congressman John P. Murtha

I make routine visits to our troops in the field and to those recovering at our military hospitals. I'm inspired by their service and dedication to this great country. But, the America they serve and protect today is far different than the America that existed prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

In just a few weeks, we will mark the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq. Five years later, the political and economic situation on the ground has changed little, while the rest of the world, including the United States, has changed significantly.

We are familiar with the visible costs associated with the war in Iraq and the sacrifices that our men and women in uniform and their families are making. We've lost nearly 4,000 troops, over 28,700 have been wounded and we have appropriated over \$535 billion. But, we are less familiar with the hidden costs, and these will have long-term consequences. Every penny of the \$535 billion we've appropriated thus far has been borrowed, meaning that the same Americans sacrificing in Iraq today will be paying for this borrowed war for the rest of their lives. It is estimated that the long-term costs of injuries alone will be at least a further \$300 billion.

Since the war began, the international credibility and respect of the United States has plummeted while instability has grown throughout the region. We've seen a dramatic rise in the economic, military and global influence of both Russia and China. An emboldened Iran seeks to more aggressively assert influence in the region. Our NATO allies are unwilling or unable to provide an additional 3,000 troops for Afghanistan. And the price of oil has climbed from \$27.18 per barrel before the war began to \$92.82 today.

Here at home, we are borrowing \$343 million every day to finance the war in Iraq while shortchanging our domestic needs. The American economy is slipping towards a recession as our housing market and financial sector are experiencing serious crises. Gas at the pump has increased from \$1.76 per gallon before the war began to its current price of \$3.07 per gallon. Our national debt has ballooned by \$2.75 trillion, increasing by nearly \$1 million per minute, while the value of the American dollar relative to other currencies has plummeted.

In the military, we have seen a deterioration of readiness, equipment and recruitment standards. We are not able to maintain the number of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan without breaking the military's own guidelines. Before the Iraq war, 80 percent of all Army units and almost 100 percent of active-duty combat units were rated at the highest level of military readiness. Just the opposite exists today. Virtually all of our active-duty combat units in the United States, and all of our guard units, are rated not combat-ready. This means that we can not sustain the current troop levels in Iraq and Afghanistan let alone provide a credible deterrent to other potential adversaries.

In order to meet recruitment goals, the Army is accepting a higher percentage of recruits who would previously have been disqualified from service because of the lack of a high school diploma, a previous criminal record, drug or alcohol problems or a health condition. Since the invasion of Iraq, the percentage of Army recruits with a high school diploma has decreased from 94 percent to 71 percent. Before the war began, 4.6 percent of Army recruits required a waiver for a criminal record; today that figure has risen to 11.2 percent.

As I've said before, our ground forces in the United States simply do not have their required equipment, and the equipment of our ground forces overseas is wearing out. It will take years and tens of billions of dollars to rehabilitate this equipment and to re-equip the force. The Air Force operates and maintains a fleet of aircraft with an average age of 24 years. When I left Vietnam in 1967, the average age of our aircraft was 8.5 years. The Navy's current shipbuilding request is grossly inadequate to meet the goal of a 313 ship fleet while maintaining our naval superiority.

I haven't even mentioned the fiscal challenges we face with health care, education, infrastructure, and the Medicare and Social Security programs.

These aren't Democratic problems or Republican problems. These are American problems.

Our next President and the American people must understand that it will require tremendous resources and strong bipartisan and international cooperation to begin to solve these problems. The future of our great country depends on it.